

National Weather Service (NWS) Service Description Document (SDD)
May 2016
NWS Use of Twitter as an Environmental Information Service

Part 1 - Mission Connection

a. Service Description:

Twitter is a social networking and microblogging service that enables its users to send and read 140-character messages called "tweets". It has over 320 million monthly active (Dec. 2015) users of whom 80% are mobile (Twitter company info: <https://about.twitter.com/company>). Twitter provides a means for the NWS to combine/contribute its authoritative voice with/to NWS partners via social media. NWS partners, from local to national, have readily adopted Twitter as a means to disseminate timely information about weather/water impacts to followers in their communities.

NWS is using Twitter as a supplemental channel to disseminate environmental information and promote weather awareness activities including outreach and educational efforts. Environmental data will either be scaled to the area served by a particular Twitter account (e.g., Weather Forecast Office level) or will contain only content of a specific type, if a content-specific account is provided (e.g., @NWSTornado--for tornado threat information, @NWSOwlieSkywarn--for preparedness information). A presence on Twitter offers a powerful tool to help disseminate life saving information; increase the public understanding of weather, water, and climate; and increase the public ability to take action.

Federal government and NWS policy require that content posted to Twitter be derived from information already on NWS official Web pages, or from officially issued NWS products. Tweets may concern:

- The science and anticipated impacts of the forecast period
- Long and short-fused warnings, watches, advisories (*after product issuance*)
- Non-weather emergency messages from emergency management officials
- Weather/Climate facts
- Outreach and educational information
- Post event information

Note: This Service Description Document has been updated to include reference to provision of short-fused watches/warnings/advisories via Twitter. NWS experience with Twitter has shown that automated posting of this content to NWS office feeds or specialized content-specific feeds is a workable means of successfully communicating this information via Twitter. Examples include:

- National Tsunami Warning Center - @NWS_NTWC
- Experimental Severe Weather Impacts Graphics - @NWSTornado, @NWSSevereTstorm, @NWSFlashFlood

b. Purpose/Intended Use:

The goal of NWS use of Twitter is both to provide timely weather warning and guidance information and to talk in plain language about the science and the impacts of weather and water to a diverse audience. Social science research has shown that people generally need to have a message come from more than one source before they will react to it. NWS use of Twitter adds another source to the already traditional methods in place.

NWS Posting Policy for Twitter (see <http://www.weather.gov/twitter>)

The National Weather Service (NWS) is using Twitter as a supplemental channel for improving weather awareness. Postings to this page highlight activities of interest and importance to both the weather community and the public, and include NWS meetings, constituent and partner engagement activities, and public education efforts.

Questions or comments about local forecasts or local advisories/watches/warnings need to be submitted to the issuing local Weather Forecast Offices. The local Weather Forecast Offices are listed at: <http://www.weather.gov/organization>.

There is no endorsement, implied or otherwise, by the NWS of any fan posts, links, or photos. Writers/fans are fully responsible for the content they submit.

Your comments are important to us and others who follow these feeds. It's important to remember that our weather community includes people of all ages and backgrounds. What seems funny to one person might be truly offensive to another. From our experience, the people who join in the dialog on these pages mostly self-moderate each other. The NWS posting policy is intended to set clear guidelines on what is appropriate for these pages. Above all, posted comments must be appropriate for all ages and be courteous and respectful of others and related to matters, activities, programs, policies or operations relevant to the NWS. NWS has established the following posting policies and reserves the right to delete postings that are inconsistent with them. Therefore, it is our policy to remove any tweet that:

- is from anyone younger than 13 years of age;
- contains defamatory, vulgar, obscene, abusive, profane, threatening, hateful, intimidating, or otherwise offensive language;
- contains malicious or offensive comments based on gender, race, class, ethnicity, national origin, political affiliation, religion, sexual orientation, disability, or other classification;
- contains advertisements, endorsements, or promotions, including spam and similar content;
- contains comments on matters unrelated to activities of the National Weather Service or its programs, policies, operations, or general areas of responsibility;
- contains impersonations or misrepresents the writer's identity or affiliation;
- contains viruses or similar harmful programs;
- contains proprietary information or intellectual property that is posted without the approval of the owner;

- recommends that members of the public contact a member of Congress or of a state or local legislature;
- contains comments regarding a candidate in a partisan political campaign or regarding a political party; or
- contains information that violates a local, state, or national law.

c. Audience:

This service is provided by all WFOs and River Forecast Centers (RFCs), as well as a number of National Centers. The audience served by this service includes any member of the general public served by the area of coverage of a participating office. Content-specific feeds may also be provided to better serve the needs of national partners whose interests are not focused on a particular local office.

To find a Twitter feed from your local forecast office, search for @NWS on Twitter. The local Weather Forecast Offices are listed at: <http://www.weather.gov/organization>.

Note: Access to this service requires a Twitter account (see <http://www.twitter.com/>). Use of Twitter to support this service does not imply an endorsement of Twitter.

d. Presentation Format:

Information is presented on Twitter as brief posts or tweets which are sent to all “followers” of a particular NWS Twitter account. A hyperlink may be provided within the post to more detailed information on an official NWS webpage, as required.

Part 2 – Technical

a. Format and Science Basis:

Manual posts will be provided by local offices. In addition, standard feeds (i.e., NWSChat) have been built to automate the dissemination of some information to particular Twitter accounts and the same mechanism/s can be used to feed other social media sites in the future. Updates will be generated mostly by RSS feed or API.

b. Availability:

Dissemination of environmental information via Twitter is considered a supplemental service. NWS posts will be made on a time-available basis.

Availability of this service is subject to constraints of Twitter service availability and to availability limitations of the users’ internet connection.